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ABSTRACT

This paper is a discussion of several of the short-term, intensive field practica experiences which have been integrated into the Memorial University graduate counselor education program. The approach in counselor education provides needed counseling services to more remote communities, enables school boards to see counselors in action, thus providing encouragement for initiating or expanding counseling services, provides valuable working links between university and schools, and serves as an integrative and solidifying guidance experience to students while still in the program. The paper discusses objectives of these short-term practica, procedures and planning, the role that these experiences play in a counselor education program, and an evaluation of the program. (Author/SP)

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"A pratin' and a natterin' and 'avin' a do a tousand gunshots from the Ivory Tower"

OR

Combining field services and graduate counselor education through intensive, short-term remote practica experiences

A paper presented at the
Regional CGCA Conference,
Halifax, Nova Scotia

by

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May, 1976

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Abstract

This presentation will deal with a discussion of several of the short-term, intensive field practica experiences which we have integrated into our Memorial University graduate counselor education program since its inception six years ago. We feel that this approach in counselor education is rather unique: it has been possible for us to provide needed counseling services to more remote communities, it has enabled school boards to see counselors in action, thus providing encouragement for initiating or expanding counseling services, it has provided valuable working links between university and schools, and it has served as an integrative and solidifying guidance experience to students while still in the program.

In the paper we will discuss objectives of these short-term practica, procedures and planning, the role that these experiences play in our counselor education program, and an evaluation of the program.

Communities visited include Mobile, Salt Pond, Burin, Bay d'Espoir, Wreck Cove, Forteau, Lance-au-Loup, Red Bay, and Lamaline.

Introduction

The Conference Committee only published the secondary title of our presentation "Combining field services and graduate counsellor education through intensive, short-term remote practica experiences." The title that we prefer is "A pratin' and a natterin' and 'avin' a do a tousand gumshots from the Ivory Tower."

Our primary title is very significant for we feel that it is essential to get away from the Ivory Tower and to bring our students and the real world together.

Our presentation this morning will deal with a discussion of several of the short-term intensive field experiences which we have integrated into our Memorial University graduate counsellor education program since its inception six years ago. We feel that this approach in counsellor education is rather unique: it has been possible for us to provide needed counselling services to more remote communities, it has enabled school boards to see counsellors in action thus providing encouragement for initiating or expanding counselling services, it has provided valuable working links between university and schools, and it has served as an integrative and solidifying guidance experience to students while still in the program.

The format that we shall use today is as follows, I will discuss the specifics and general objectives and our rationale for establishing a program of extended field experiences. I will also provide you with a description of some of the settings and the roles we play in the settings.

Next Dr. Lee Klas will discuss the cost and planning of the projects. Following Lee, Dr. Norm Garlie will talk about what we classify as "spin-off" from the experiences. Lee will then briefly give you our views toward evaluation of the programs and some of our recommendations.

We are also fortunate to have Mr. Alfred Anstey, the Guidance Supervisor for the Burin Peninsula Integrated School Board, with us today. Alf will provide you with some feelings that he has concerning the program from the point of view of one of the school boards that has worked with us over the years.

We shall then invite questions and comments from you.

History of the Field Service Program

The involvement of graduate students and faculty cannot in justice be called a formal program. As it has evolved through six years it has at all times reflected the current status of the graduate program, the needs of the students and of the school districts.

At the time Memorial's graduate program started, guidance services were available only in St. John's, with only a few other interested part-time workers having been established in other areas of the Province. School populations were small, geographically isolated from one another. With no experience with guidance, and with widely varying perceptions of needs in the districts, graduate student participation was at first quite ad hoc, with a focus on finding out just what was possible, and to discover the best ways to organize, coordinate and finance the trips.

In the fall of 1970 an instructor in the guidance program was approached by an official of the Green Bay Integrated School Board for assistance in conducting a testing programme. Recognizing the possibilities, two trips for graduate students were organized. The first, for three days, was to organize and familiarize the students with the area, and to determine the activities to be pursued in a later one week visit.

The Green Bay District, on the northern coast on two peninsulas between White Bay and Notre Dame Bay, is an historic and extremely interesting area. Ten students and an instructor were involved that year, visiting schools ranging from one to twenty rooms, sometimes located on small islands accessible only by longliner. That year, students helped with the district testing program and conducted group guidance classes in career development.

Although a little individual counselling was done, the students had only begun their programs so they were limited in the services that they could render.

In the fall of 1971 a second trip to Green Bay was planned, the first having been adjudged a resounding success. This time planning began during the preceding spring and students spent a week at a variety of tasks, again including testing and group guidance. This time sophistication began to appear as norming projects were undertaken. One student performed an evaluation of a small school which included visiting homes of the students and conducting interviews with parents.

During the school year 1972-73 the nature of the program changed. At the beginning of the year, an instructor wrote each of the boards in the island, indicating that visits were possible. Based on the response, two one week visits occurred in February and March to the Bay D'Espoir District on the south coast, an extremely isolated area, and to the Burin Roman Catholic School District. In April, a third visit was taken to the Burin Integrated School District. Whereas in the past the trips had been funded by the University, school districts now began to pay part or all of the expenses. Student activities became much broader, partly as a consequence of waiting until later in the year to go. Teacher workshops were held, group and individual counseling, assessment of learning problems, and career guidance were activities preplanned and implemented in the districts.

Since then, the program has continued in a similar vein. Return trips to the Burin Peninsula have become an annual event. In addition, students have visited Botwood and Peterview, Flowers Cove in the northwest of the island and the Labrador coast.

Objectives of the Field Service Program

The program objectives can be seen to arise from a philosophy embodying three aspects. First, the University, and the Counsellor Education Program, is viewed as a resource which should be made available to schools in Newfoundland and Labrador. Second, all things considered, it is a good thing for student counsellors to become familiar with the areas in which they will work, and to practice their skills in a real setting. Third, a close,immersion-like relationship between students and instructors will lead to greater understanding and will facilitate student achievement.

One could write three general objectives around this philosophy, emphasizing each of the three aspects. Operationally, trips are planned to meet expressed needs of schools, and are almost always at the invitation of the local school boards. They always are outside of the immediate area of St. John's, and are usually in the rural isolated and semi-isolated communities and schools which are so characteristic of the Province. They always involve both students and instructors working together as colleagues to implement the objectives of the particular trip.

Specific objectives of the program are related to the nature of the trip itself. There is usually a planning and administration component, which at a minimum involves the identification and clarification of the needs of the district. Financing must be arranged and materials gathered. The work is apportioned out, each student being involved in some aspect of the preparation.

The program is an informal complement to the more formally structured counsellor education program. It extends the scope of the counsellor's training in a way that has proven to be meaningful, useful and enjoyable.

Description of Settings and Roles in Setting

There is an old "down east" joke about the tourist stopping a farmer and asking, "How can I get to East Vasselboro?" The farmer in reply stated, "Well if you take the high road east---No! Let's see, you go along the lower branch till you get to---No! Well I tell you what, you drive west to the first fork and then---No! You know, I guess you can't get there from here."

Getting there is sometimes half the battle in Newfoundland and Labrador. There are times when it seems you just can't get there from here.

This past March, a team of five graduate students and one professor as team leader were requested by the local school board to provide services on the South Coast of Labrador. They left the University in St. John's at midnight on a Sunday. After driving 400 miles to Deer Lake, they learned that they would be unable to fly that day as the Airport in Blanc Sablon (a community in the Quebec portion of Labrador) was snowed in. Undaunted the team stayed in Deer Lake. The following day, they were informed that the road to the airport in Blanc Sablon was still blocked, but that the runway had been cleared. A call to the principal of the high school in Forteau resulted in arrangements being made for snowmobiles with Komitiks (sleds) to meet the team at the airport. Two trips were required to fly the team to Blanc Sablon as runway conditions were suitable only for a five seater plane. This also necessitated that much of the team's luggage had to be left behind.

Arriving in Blanc Sablon, the team travelled by snowmobile fifteen miles across the "mesh" (marsh) to Lance au Clair. After thawing out, the members of the team walked a half mile to a waiting school bus equipped with chains for the ten mile trip to Forteau. There they were transported by car to the various homes where they were to stay.

During the same visit the team leader was requested to visit Red Bay (a community about 40 miles further north). He walked out on to the ice to

board the Grenfell Mission plane only to find that an additional nurse was needed and, therefore, had his seat. He was now in the unenviable position of having to consult with a teacher he had never met about two students he had never met, who resided in a community that he had never seen - by telephone.

Now, not all of our trips involve snowmobiles and planes, sometimes we travel by coastal boat. Many times, however, our teams are able to make the trips by car. Even when roads are available, distance is often a problem as Newfoundland is an Island of peninsulas and bays. There is only one highway (the Trans Canada) across the Island and then each of the peninsulas usually has a single highway down its length. Once off a major highway and in fact on several of the highways, travel is usually on gravel roads.

Regardless of mode of transportation, we usually get there. The schools where our teams consult range from one and two room multi-grade schools to modern fully equipped DREE schools.

(SHOW SLIDES)

The roles performed at the settings are as varied as the settings themselves. Generally a major role we perform is that of assessors for special education. We do group and individual intelligence testing, achievement testing and vocational interest surveys. Consulting with individual teachers regarding particular students is another role we play.

In addition to the above roles, individual schools have asked us to perform particular supplementary services by individual boards and schools. In Mobile, for example, we provided intensive vocational information and counselling to grade eleven students. The Burin Integrated School Board, on the most recent of our three trips requested that we concentrate our efforts in assessing and consulting with the Board and their teachers regarding their

Kindergarten program.

Our emphasis with the Exploits Valley Integrated School Board was concentrated in one economically depressed community where we consulted with teachers, provided intelligence testing services, and made recommendations for improved learning situations.

Similarly on our trips to the Green Bay and Bay D'Espoir Districts we have tried to meet the needs of the schools within the limits of our competencies.

Costs and Planning

Ideas, indeed programs, are useful only if they can be properly organized and adequately funded. In the case of these short-term practica experiences, the Department of Educational Psychology and the various school boards have worked out various cost-sharing arrangements and have shared in the planning and organization of the visits. It has become increasingly apparent that this mutuality in planning and "paying the shot" is one of the most fundamental aspects of the program; obviously, both parties have needs they want to meet and services they can provide.

In almost all cases, the planning aspect began when a school official contacted the Department about the possibility of receiving some counseling and assessment services. Generally, one school official and one Department member will work out such details as the specific needs of the school district, resources available in the Department, timing of the visits, lodging, travel, materials, and cost-sharing. At times, requests have to be tempered to allow for the resources and time available; at times, requests which at first appear impossible to meet are somehow filled.

Students in the counseling program are brought into the planning stage as quickly as possible. The visits were usually planned during mid-term or between semester breaks, although on some occasions a few classes were missed. The requests from the boards are discussed with the students in the graduate program as soon as possible in the planning process. Those expressing an interest in the adventure are then brought up-to-date on the plans and become part of the planning group.

Materials and resources become the mutual responsibility of the board and the Department. The degree of responsibility shared by both parties has

varied with the different visits and the type of requests from the boards. Cost-sharing agreements between university and school boards have varied, to some degree, for each of the field visits. The Department of Educational Psychology has a unit in its budget for field services and practica from which such expenses are paid; school boards generally have a unit in their budget for consultative services from which they would cover such costs.

Needless to say, costs can be cut down when need be: local homes or vocational school residences can be used instead of the more expensive hotel/motel lodging; meals can be taken at private homes and at schools; no honoraria are charged to the boards for any of the services.

Such a sharing of responsibility for funding and planning has not only the psychological advantage of involvement - thus - commitment but also such an arrangement enables both school boards and university to carry out programs which, if done individually, would be cost-prohibitive. For example, on one such occasion four university professors and eight graduate students spent five days carrying out consultative, assessment, and program development activities in one school board. What would be a conservative estimate as to the full cost for twelve such consultants for five days? Substitute teacher rates alone would cost around $4200 for the week; this figure, of course, would not include costs of materials, lodging, transportation and special honoraria which are often demanded by such consultants. An estimate of $8000 would certainly be conservative. School boards report actual costs for these visits at from 5 to 15% of that cost. In like manner, if the university had to build and maintain its own school settings for such field practica the cost would be prohibitive. Cost to the university for these visits have

varied between $50 and $600. Thus, both parties gain a tremendous financial advantage from such a program. This is, of course, not even considering all the other than financial benefits emerging from such a program (practical experience for counselor trainees, keeping professors in contact with the field, direct help to school children, school-university relations, promotion of the need for guidance services). The usefulness of such short-term, remote practica experiences far outweighs all the effort which goes into the planning and organization.

"Spin-Offs"

My task is to share with you some of the social aspects of our adventures a "tcusand gunshots from the ivory tower," some observations regarding the professional development of our students, and comment on some of what we have chosen to call the "spin-offs" of these experiences.

The area of social involvements is easy to talk about but more difficult to formalize in writing. It seems formalization of this particular topic tends to negate its importance. We have learned over the past few years that, generally speaking, relationships between graduate students and faculty are relatively formal. We have also learned that our "barnstorming" trips tend to break down this formality and lead to positive student-faculty interactions and, we think, an improved learning environment. Perhaps a few examples will help explain our point.

To get to the locations of our practicum experiences we often have to travel lengthy distances. This has given us the opportunity for informal discussions and last minute planning plus a forum for debate about what we will do or in some cases what we should have done. The idea of continuous planning and immediate feedback is automatically incorporated.

Perhaps even more important are the numerous social events (some planned by local school boards and some spontaneous) which provide for a different "knowing" between students and faculty. For example, having a dart game in a local tavern, in a small community, and learning later that the female graduate students with you were probably the first women to ever be in this particular male haven. For example, learning to dance the Newfie jig with the graduate student as the teacher. For example, playing volley ball (and getting beaten) at 2 a.m. while having a discussion of the cases from the previous day. For example, having all night "bull sessions" (perhaps I

should say follow-up consultations) to deal with the problems which arose during the day and to plan what to do the next day. For example - and here's a hot one - being invited to join in a late night "smoke-up" (and I don't mean cigars) and having to deal with the moral/ethical dilemmas this can raise. For example, travelling by skidoo from one school to another with your Parka, your toothbrush and your WISC kit.

We could go on for hours (and probably will when we see you at cocktail time) but let me re-emphasize the importance that the more informal aspects of this experience have in terms of developing not only better rapport with students but in many cases developing lasting friendships as well. The fact that one overhears comments (I think this was after the Newfie jig) such as - "My gosh they are human!"

Another valuable aspect of this entire experience has been the professional development of the graduate students. We have watched the shy, tentative student flower and develop when thrust into a challenging practical situation. We have observed the "over confident" student get his wings clipped - regrow them - and fly at a more reasonable altitude. In short, we have found a testing ground for our new "models" that has helped iron out the "bugs" before they go into full production. We have also had the opportunity for modeling behaviors which help the graduate students more easily slip into the professional role that will be expected of them in a few short months. For example, the graduate students have had to cope with an extremely wide variety of "real life" problems from testing a trainable retarded child (with mother waiting in the hall for an explanation) to arranging a district-wide workshop for teachers. With these experiences our students report they feel more comfortable in arriving at a new school setting (usually being the only guidance person within a 100 miles) and dealing with the problems that develop.

This in itself makes the loss of sleep, hangovers, and angry wives worth the involvement on our part.

Let me spend a few more minutes sharing with you some of the things that have happened that we would like to say were preplanned but actually were not part of what was expected. These we can call "spin-offs." In some ways the following are just an extension of the two areas mentioned above. I am sure I've missed some and I have probably loaded it heavily with things in which I was directly involved. Realizing how bashful and retiring my colleagues are, I am not at all concerned, as you will hear the ones I missed either during our presentation or later.

Let me begin with public relations an important one in these days of declining enrollment. You might ask what are counsellor educators doing involved in this "administrative" area. Although not a planned strategy by the very fact that we were out in the schools, in fairly rural areas, doing practical work the schools wanted done, we were involved in changing the traditional university image. Schools begin to see the university in a more service orientated manner.

Student recruitment is a related area. We soon learned that we were able to further explain university programmes to both teachers and students which in turn led to some students making a decision to attend university and for some teachers to return for graduate study.

Job placement. We have learned that by exposing our 'product' (horrible word isn't it) to the school we have increased "sales." More important we have increased the short term and long term demand for our graduates. Counselors are often being placed in schools because of the skills and abilities demonstrated during these visits.

Follow-up of former students. Since we all teach both undergraduate and

graduate courses, we found many of our former students out in the schools. Furthermore, as one might guess, they are eager to see you, share their experiences with you, etc. We found this feedback very valuable in adjusting our on-campus courses to the needs of the teacher in the field.

Program feedback. We have also had valuable feedback regarding our graduate program. Again, we have become sensitive to the areas in which we were not adequately preparing our students and have made appropriate adjustments. The students have also been able to identify research topics during this experience which have been of joint benefit to both the student and the schools.

Now to some of the important "spin-offs." We have learned where to obtain lobster at very low prices (and we won't tell). We have discovered how a fish plant works (Vocational Counselling Training) and that the price of Halibut is also not bad. We have learned how to drive and repair snowmobiles. How to live on minimal living allowances. (The secret is one we freely share i.e. the generosity of outport Newfoundlanders.) We have learned (or relearned) how to function on 1½ hours sleep - with a hangover, for a full week. (I really think that our earlier graduate training was what got us through this ordeal.) We have become relatively "bilingual" (note the paper's subtitle). We have discovered some of the best trout and salmon fishing locations in Eastern Canada (Sorry - not for publication). We have relearned the fact that education of children and graduate students can and does take place in a variety of settings and under a variety of conditions and that the quality of life in some of our rural areas is what we wish it was in our more urban areas.

Now let us hear about...

AN OBSERVATION MADE BY ONE SCHOOL DISTRICT (THE BURIN PENINSULA INTEGRATED SCHOOL BOARD) OF THE VISITS BY THE MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY GUIDANCE TEAM DURING THE SPRINGS OF 1973, 1975 AND 1976.

This observation will outline some of the benefits accrued the District. It will also include a short general comment regarding limitations and subsequent recommendations.

Some of the benefits include:

1. Viewed in terms of the quantity of services provided by the team there was a considerable saving in man-hours. For example, during the initial visit in 1973 the team was involved mainly in administering both group and individual assessment and diagnostic tests. At this time the district was limited in personnel who were trained in the area of administering standardized tests. The services provided by the team noticeably facilitated the initial screening that was necessary in setting up special programs for slower children. During the next visit in 1975 the team further provided some testing services. This time testing was done on an individual basis and only as it was necessary in working with individual kids who were having problems.

2. Maybe less measurable, but perhaps a more important service provided was in the way of suggestions. The team made observations and suggestions to teachers and board office personnel about children and programs which for the most part were constructive and highly helpful. For example, in their last visit in April 1976, the team consisted of several corrective

reading specialists and guidance people. This team spent the week in four of our schools observing and working with Kindergarten teachers; particularly in the area of reading. The objective was for them to examine what we were doing in Kindergarten and to make recommendations. Classroom demonstrations were made followed by suggestions to teachers in general discussions held at the end of each day's activity. Many of the suggestions made confirmed those already advocated by us, but there may have been a higher level of acceptance when they were made by an external group, especially from people who were considered experts in their field. Although somewhat subjective, our evaluation of this exercise seems to indicate that it was very useful.

3. This kind of exercise provides an excellent opportunity for school districts and students graduating from the Guidance Program who will be looking for employment to sample what each has to offer. It also gives more meaning to the communication carried on between board personnel and university faculty when the former are looking for recommendations on prospective employees. In this respect, we highly recommend the exercise.

4. The exercise also creates an exposure which helps to provide an incentive to continued professional growth on the part of teachers. As a result of exchanging information on new ideas and techniques, teachers look for better ways

and means of achieving specific educational goals. Also having some of their teaching practices challenged cause them to take a more serious look at what they are presently doing in the classroom. For example, during the last visit which concentrated primarily on reading at the Kindergarten level teachers became more acutely aware of the necessary pre-reading skills. This led them to make plans to develop or investigate appropriate activities which would facilitate teaching the required skills. As a result the teachers in one of our primary schools have already made plans in consultation with other qualified personnel within the District to follow through on possible program changes.

5. Our district regards good communication between us in the field and the University as important. For us in the District it helps us keep abreast of learning theory while providing University with the opportunity to test theory in actual classroom situations.

These visits along with other continuing contacts we have with the University promote good rapport.

General Comments

Since the visits are so short, (one week), in planning for a visit the University and the School District need to be more specific as to what the District would like for the team to do and the University be more specific as to what services they can offer. This, we think, would better enable both parties to get the most out of the venture.

Evaluation & Recommendations

Alf Anstey can provide you with feedback from one school board as to the usefulness of such a program. Feedback from the boards has been excellent; of course, the university group is not able to "do it all." Some of our goals for the visit may not have been met; we have never yet seen all the children and consulted with all the teachers we had hoped to. Physical arrangements have worked out remarkably well. At times slightly longer visits may have been called for.

As a counselor training experience, we have been most happy with the visits; a referral back to Dr. Garlie's discussion of the benefits and spin-off's from the visits would underline their usefulness. Practical field application of one's training during his training is both academically and professionally sound; the university needs to reach out more to school boards, to place, when possible, some of its expertise and manpower at the disposal of outside agencies, especially in such a program where the benefits are so obviously mutual. The personal and professional relationships formed between those in the field and the graduate students and faculty have proven to be lasting and memorable.

At the end of our presentation I would invite any graduate students who have been involved in these visits to share their reactions to such a program. From all reports the experience, for the students, has been described as integrative, meaningful, practical, eye-opening, confusing, demanding, fun, exhaustive, informative, and at times, frustrating because so much needs to be done. Students have always marvelled at the hospitality shown by the board officials.

There are several recommendations emerging from our experiences with such a field practicum program:

(1) In most cases a minimum of one week in the schools is required; two weeks would be preferable.

(2) Universities should try to work these visits into the credit for practicum, into a special topics credit, or in fact, into a separate field credit of its own.

(3) It is desirable, but by no means necessary to have guidance personnel in the schools visited.

(4) It is advisable to have most of the tasks outlined and understood by all parties before arrival in the setting; however, flexibility is imperative---be prepared to change your plans in mid-stream, if necessary.

(5) The sharing of costs and responsibility for planning is crucial to the success of the venture. Students must carry their share of the responsibility for planning.

(6) Utilize graduate students and faculty from other professional areas as well (i.e., reading specialists, social work, nursing). It is so important that students training in different professional areas get direct knowledge of the skills and orientations of each other before they get out in the field.

(7) Although this program has been voluntary on the students' part, such a program could be required for certain students who are lacking in prior field experience or in developing counseling skills. Such a program can also serve to encourage independent functioning and reasoning on the part of the students.

(8) The evening case conference is an integral part of the program; it should be an expected part of the experience.

(9) Don't say that "it can't be done." There may be barriers to overcome, people to reassure and convince, students to encourage, time to find, but none of these mitigate against trying. Feel free to approach the "other" setting about your plans and needs. You'll be surprised at what can be done.